

The Substance of a LETTER,
occasioned by a Discourse of the Time
CALLED
CHRISTMAS,
From an ABUSE on it.

L. N.

I Have in mind thy Friendly Visit after our Dirty Abuse and thy Admonition, seasonable, as thou it may be thought 'st for the future. But as for the Apostolical Tradition of *Christmas*, which thou saidst thou hadst read in several Authors, I am so unsatisfied in it, that I have a Desire to obtain the sight of one of them: for I love to read a Piece that does say the utmost. 'Tis a Maxim, *None would be Deceived*. I am sure I would not, and would not have others. I have read some of the most learned Antiquaries and Chronologers concerning it. Our Country-man *J. Selden*, speaks as much for it, I think, as can be, in a Treatise of it under his Name, and more than may be, shewing more Reading than Ingenuoulness, or Ingeniousness through Inconsistency (and so no Genuinness in the Treatise) obvious to a mean Understanding. For though such Authors (Antiquaries) like Travellers, think they may Lye by Authority, because few can contradict them; yet many may when they contradict themselves, yea, almost any. For, owning *J. Selden's* Assertion in his Review, viz. That in the Eastern Church the Celebration of that Day was not received on the 25th of *December*, till the ancient Tradition of it was learned

A

from

Harvard College Library
Feabody Fund
January 7, 1938

from the Western about four hundred years after Christ. This Treatise to vindicate him from inclining to the *Puritan*, reels quite over the *Protestant*; and for fear of the Brand of their hot Brain, as he saies, he leaps into the Purgatory of the *Papish* Tenet of the inherent Holiness of the Exact time, and that upon the Ground of unwritten Tradition; which he gives no Reason for not being first known in the Eastern Church, as well as the written; which absurdity implies a Contradiction. And he shews no Author in the first four hundred years before the institution of it that mentions it: But *Clemens* of *Alexandria* (where was a Patriarchal Church, being in the East, where the Church Cycles were kept, wherein there is no Rule for this Epicycle, nor gives this Treatise any, why it should be retrograde from *Rome* thither) he taxeth them of Curiosity that pretend to know either the Day, the Moneth or the Year of Christ's Birth, and speaks of two Opinions about it, falling both in Summer Time. And this *Clemens* lived about Eighty Years after the Apostle time. If all the Eastern Churches had slept all that time, they would (as they Story of the Seven Sleepers) at their awaking have remembred surely, whether they had kept it in *Summer* or *Winter*; seeing the Tradition of it, which the later Fathers write of, was on the *Winter Solstice-Day*, that is Two Weeks before the time wherein it is now observed; which is another Contradiction, to say, *That the Exact time of the Birth only is sacred*, which was at the *Solstice*; and yet say, *That the Tradition of that Day, as it is now kept through all Christendom, is both Apostolical and as Ancient as the Birth itself*: whereas the *Julian* and *Gregorian* Account of it differ Ten Dayes one from another, and both differ from the True Account according to *Astronomy*. Can all these three be the Exact Time, especially ours of the *Dionysian* Account, which makes (as *Sealiger* shews) the Birth of Christ to have been Two Years after *Herod's* Death, who sought his Life? Or can the very Name of the 25th of *December*, though not the Exact Time, make it sacred by inherent Holiness in the Time? He calls *Cardan* Impious for tying the Mystery of the Sacred Time to the Rules of *Astrology*, and yet tying it himself to the Rules

of *Astronomy* (which he confesses Uncer ain; another Contradiction) and to the Course of the Sun only, and not also of the Moon, as well as the *Passion Day*, about the Time of which all *Christendom* was in Broiles, and Excommunicating one another. Concerning which he saith, Peter, and James, and John teaching at Alexandria, taught Mark, Bishop there, the true Time of that Feast. Did the Apostles then conspire to carry away the Tradition of the Birth Day so closely from *Mark to Rome*? Why! was it that Peter's Successor there should teach *Mark's* Successor the Exact Time, four hundred years after, to shew the Pre-eminence of that See? Must that Feast alone be retrograde in their Divinity grounded on *Astronomy*? And was it Apostolical, and from the Birth it self, before Apostles were, and before some of them were in being (a Miracle beyond the *Papists*) to confirm his *Papish* Tenet) Did his Brethren that despised him, the Carpenter, keep it from his Birth? or his Father reputed and Mother, to whom he was obedient, keep it, contrary to their Fathers Examples, and their Account, after the Example of *Herod the Idumean*, and the *Romans*, and their Account (as it is now, and as he sayes it was) who, as *Polydore Virgil* sayes, received that Custom from the *Persians* of Observing Birth-days. As this man doth from the Example of those that kept the Birth-dayes of *Philosophers*, *Princes* and *Heathen Gods*, saying, Therefore he that scruples it to Christ, deserves not the Name of a Christian: But then he should have shewn, that the Apostles got that Name upon that account, and that they sacrificed Men to him also, as the *Heathen* did here in *Brittain*, and else-where, to their Gods, and what not; for one will follow as well as the other, from that Reason of his; and so did many things else, as *Hospinian* shews, who disputes this Point largely against *Beharwine*, which this man takes for granted, namely, the Sacredness of Times, not by Institution, but of themselves by Inference, taking no notice of him (nor of the Answers of *Protestants* to his Testimonies for unwritten Tradition) only he mentioning him amongst those Learned Men that oppose the Day, as *Beroul*, *Pantius de Middleburgo*, *Susliga*, *Jos. Scaliger*, *Kepler*, *Wolphim*, *Lidiat*, *Calvisius*, *Casanbon*, &c. But he says,

sayes he did it according to Instructions: It seems he had not a mind to it, but as aforesaid; for the Times turning, it lay by him Twenty Years, it may seem, when it should in its way have informed Opposers (if ingenuous or genuine) and for any thing that appears by the Edition 1661. without his direction came out to countenance the Times, when it was like to be pecuniary seven years after his Death, which Characters were usually urged against Supposititious Pieces, as against the Constitutions of *Clement*, &c. There was something in it also (increasing the Suspicion) that he being a Lawyer, inclining to the Magistrates Power about Religion (with the *Erastians*) as appeared in his History of Tythes, and the *Assembly of Divines*, should yet here take the Plea of some Divines for the Sacredness of this, and glad of such a Divinity that's but grounded on *Astronomy*. For he sayes, *That Peter and Mark an Hundred Years after Christ's Birth, grew better Astronomers, and settled Easter*. It is a Wonder then, they settled not this other too, but left it at random to the Error of the Fathers (as he confesseth, because, as he sayes, they were no good *Astronomers*) and of all Christian-Churches ever since, to Prophane the Exact Sacred Time, as he calls it, and all the immoveable Feasts depending on it, after the Course of the Sun and Example of the *Heathen*. These things and the Authorities he brings from *Nicephorus Calistus*, a Fabulous Author, *Ann. 1300.* and the *Martyrology of Rome*, and the *Menology*, which might suit the Time to the received Custom then (as in the Chronicle of *Alexandria* the Translator made the 21th of *December* the 25th, he sayes) with other Suspicious Testimonies of later Times, that he brings, are not sufficient (to use his own Expressions) to inform a Judgment against the Silence or contrary Testimony of the first four hundred years (if the Question depended there) *Chrysostom* knowing nothing of that his only Instance of *Nicomedia*, so near him in place and time (which also contradicts his Assertion of the East not knowing it for four hundred years) nor the *Armenians* at this day, who keep it not yet, then knowing nothing of it, nor of *Chrysostom's* Sermon about it. If the Exactness of *Chrysostom's* Instructions from *Rome* be credible (on which the main strength lies)

lies) that the very Day of *Quirinus* his Taxation in *Jury* was found in *Rome* to be on the *Winter Solstice Day*, and the Year not found, as he proves, contradicting his Authorities out of Barbarous Translations out of *Eusebius* and *Africanus*; its an Argument against it; seeing 'tis probable thereby, that the Tradition of the *Solstice Day* sprung from that (not being known before) the Taxation being then found, if truly delivered, to be about the *Solstice*: As *Cæsar* design'd his two Passages into *Britain* by the Equinox.

I have been the longer on him, as being the only Man I have read of the inherent Holiness of the Time, and Apostolical Tradition of it, that thou alledgedst; and it may be the Author thou meanest, styled, *The Eminently Learned Antiquary*.

And as for thy other Allegation in thy *Admonition*, viz. *That all ENGLAND keeps it*.

He that reads the Church-Histories, and minds the Effects of pressing the National Worships, and the Sufferings that the sincere Worshippers, according to what was manifest to them, have undergone in all Ages, will think that also an insufficient Argument, to inform the Judgment, or to quiet the Conscience, by the subjecting it thereto. For besides what the holy Scriptures record, of *Nebuchadnezzar* his pressing his Religion he had devised, and casting the three Children, for refusing to submit to it, into the Fiery Furnace: of the *Persians* casting *Daniel* into the Lyons Den, for setting his Window open, and praying to God, contrary to their Law, &c. Other Histories also relate how the *Gracians* forced their Worships on the *Jews*; as in the *Maccabees* the cruelty of *Antiochus* to them is notorious. After them the *Romans* pressed theirs on the *Christians*; who not being subject to them therein, were put to Death by them. And so was *Paul* himself, who had transgressed his own Precept in his Epistle to the *Romans*, chap. 13. 1. *Let every Soul be subject to the Higher Powers, &c.* (urged so often against us) if he had understood it in Religious Matters, that the *Romans* should be subject to their Emperour therein; who on the contrary suffered most Cruel Torments, rather than to condescend to Swear at
their

their Command, during three hundred years. Afterward the *Christians* (especially the *Arrians*) persecuted one another, for National Worships, as the Emperors came to be on their side. After them the *Papists* for many Ages. Then the *Protestants*;

*Magdeb. Abridg-
ment by Osiander.*

*Hist. of Council of
Trent, p. 295. 48,
387, 393.*

though about *Anno 1548.* in *Germany* a Council or Assembly of them there declared, *That Ceremonies imposed were bad, and they that submitted to them were Censured:* And before that had the Name of *Protestants*, for protesting against the Decree for *Fortible Imposing Masters*

concerning Religion: Yet afterwards the prevailing Party among them have Persecuted the other about Conformity to their National Worships; and caused that none should Buy nor Sell, but such as had their Mark and their Name in the Forehead of their Profession, and veiled Bonnet to their Ma's Times. Is not that an evident Mark of bowing to an Image of their own making? for Christ commanded no such Image of him. *Hos-*

pinian sayes, *De Orig. Fest.*
Ar. cap. 2.

This is attributed to Antichrist, *Dan. 7.* as the *Papists*, to make Holy Days, one more than another, in regard of the Mystery.

In this Particular, in his Treatise of the Birth Day of the Lord, he sayes, He believes they instituted it in the Month of *December*, not because they believed Christ was then born, but that they turned the Feasts of their God *Saturn* into it, which were kept at *Rome* at that time; and he shews wherein Customs agreed that were observed in them both, in very many Respects. Here in *England* *Polydore Virgil* instances one of the Lords of Misrule, used in those Feasts. Some say *Julius Caesar's* Feasts were turned into it at *York*, therefore called *Iule* there. After which manner *Hospinian* shews very many Feasts in the Church came to be instituted. *Nazianzen* and *Clariss. Luthprandus* shew the agreement of Riots in both Feasts. *Tertullian* calls *New-Years Gifts Saturn's (Saturnalia)* so doth *Jerom.* Green things were also used by the *Heathen*, and *Misello* revered by the Priests here in *Brittain*, called *Druides*. The time of the bringing them in by Pope *Leo* and others, in condescending to the *Heathen*, is shewed in *Pisgah Evangelica*, namely, to suit the

the *Goths*, and those other Barbarous Nations in Religions, how he brought many things into the Church agreeable thereto, as had been done in several things at several times before. And must they not go out again, when they are discovered? Must *Christians* be forced to keep up the Monuments of Idolatry and Superstition in Gospel Times? seeing the *Jews* in the time of the Law were commanded to destroy them, as in *Deut. 12.* and many other places. And the *Galatians* were suspected for observing *Dayes*, and *Times*, and *Moneths*, and *Years*, which had been once indulged to the *Jews*, and ordained by God. And should we be compelled to keep those he never commanded? *Socrates Eccles.* who lived soon after the Stirrs about keeping *Easter*, sayes, *Our Saviour and his Apostles* L. 5. c. 22. never commanded his by any Law, as the Law of *Moses* did, &c. (*Nicephorus* also saith the same.) But that *Christians* L. 12 c. 32. drawn by a certain Custom, by Tradition, because they loved *holy dayes* to rest from labours, as every one thought good celebrated the Passion. *Jerom* (on *Gal.*) to the Question of *Festivals*, saith, *All dayes are equal*; and the *holy day* of the *Resurrection* is *alwayes*: and saith, *He eats the Lord's Flesh alwayes*, &c. *Durandus* saith (l. 6 c. 1.) *More than Five Thousand Festivals fall on every day through the whole year*; so it should be a continual Feast (as a good Conscience is) if the Kingdom of God consisted in *meat* and *drink*, which the Apostle saith it doth not, but in *Righteousness*, *Peace* and *Joy in the Holy Ghost*. I have read in several of the *Fathers*, as *Chrysostom*, *Jerom*, *Theodoret*, *Euthymius*, That God indulged several things to the *Jews* as to *Children*, to bring them off from *Idols*, and from performing them to *Idols*, as in this of *Festis*, because they loved *Beky-Chear*; God suffered them to be done to himself, in their own respect, not *his*, who took no Pleasure in them, *Pl. 50, & 51.* And on that of the Prophet, *Spake I a word of Sacrifices*, &c. only obey my Voice. *Rabanus* & *Lyra* note (on *Jer. 7.* & *Isa. 66.*) That Ordinances concerning such things were not given till after they had worshipped the *Golden Calf* [as they had learned of the *Egyptians*] and sate down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. But Christ put an end to such things when the time was come that God sought such to worship him, as did it in Spirit and Truth, and not their

own Bellies. He appointed no Worship then with *Feasting* nor with *Fasting*. And as for the Types of the *Paschal Lamb*, &c. he fulfilled & put an end to them, & all that Priesthood with its Rites. He commanded, to give to Cæsar *the things that are Cæsar's*, and to God *the things that are God's*. And he gave Tribute to Cæsar, though free, and his Apostle. Therein we have his Example too, as well as God's Command to the *Jews* to live quietly under *Nebuchadnezzar*: But neither commanded to give to them the Honour due to himself, to appoint his Worship for him. Must God be at Man's Courtessie, (CHRIST placed in their PANTHEON) as those called the Fathers reasoned with them of old, who consecrated them for Gods whom themselves pleased, and appointed *Feasts* and *Temples* for them? God appointed his own Worship in the Law, and left it not to Man to appoint it; much less in the Gospel, when it is promised, *Ye shall be all taught of God*. And he appoints his own Ministers, whom he pleaseth, not Man. He saith, *In vain do ye worship me, teaching for Doctrines the Traditions or Commands of Men*. It hath been accounted a good *Protestant* Plea, to argue from the Scripture negatively. There is no Command in the Scripture (nor Example, that I remember, besides *Herod's*) to keep a *Birth-day*; neither therein doth the Time thereof appear. Though some of the Ancients would seem

Luke 1. 5. compared with 1 Cbr. 24. 13.

to prove it from *Luke 1.* upon mistake of *Zacharias's* being High Priest (wherein the Uncertainty of the Testimony of the Fathers alone doth appear) who as *Scaliger* sayes, concluded thereupon, against the Scriptures, that to be the time, from the High Priests time of burning Incense: whereas it appears plainly there, that *Zacharias* was of the 8th course, to burn Incense in his course, in the Temple only. And on that Error, *Scaliger* saith (whom the Learned call *The great Critick of Times*) depended the Institution of the 25th of December, not before the year 400. But there's more ground or argument from *Luke 1. 26.* that it was not at that time, but in *Summer* (or about the time of his Suffering) according to what *Clem. Alex.* sayes of the Eastern People, *Egyptians, Arabians, &c.* If the sixth Moneth there spoken of, was the sixth Moneth of the Year (as well as of *Elizabeth*) as the Language of the Scripture is, & of the Fathers, according to the *Jews* reckoning.

And

And the Rule in Interpretations is, according to Bp. *Andrews* (on *Comm.*) *In ambiguis utrumq;*, Both Senses to be taken when analogy of Faith will allow it, as it will here. And if those that *Clement* *Alex.* speak of did conclude from hence, though uncertain, yet 'twas more safe, than for the other to conclude upon a certain falsehood: But that, as the Author excuses it, *The Fathers using the Scripture Language and Jews Manner in the numerical Title of the Months* (as we do; wherein he has given us Authority from the *Fathers* as well as *Scriptures*, for naming the Months not after the *Heathenish* manner, and Names of their Gods) that they should thereby mistake the 9th month of the Egyptians for the 9th month of the Jews, is as credible as the other Miracles, & that they should mistake *Summer* for *Winter*, as aforesaid: and both are Arguments against the constant Tradition of it. Some will say, *What a business 'tis to keep a Day in Remembrance of Christ, without Scripture-proof!* And we say, What a business they make of it, without Scripture (and therefore in Point of Worship, against it, according to the *Protestants*, as aforesaid) so as to abuse People about it, in honour of it. The *Protestants* at the Council of *Basil*, maintained, That if *Monkery* was not of God, 'twas of the Devil (*Comenius* *Schlavon. Hist.*) so said *Luther* of the Pope. And what a business, might some say, to bow the Knee to Christ's Image, to take his *Body*, as they thought, in a *Wafer Cake*, in their Mouth! Were those stubborn and wilful people, that would rather be burnt, than do it, in *Q. Mary's* dayes? What a matter 'twas, thought the *Greeks*, for the *Jews* to take a piece of *Flesh* in their Mouth, to escape Death, in the *Maccabees*: and for the Children in *Daniel* to feed of the King's Meat and Drink. The Commands of Men seem light to them that know not or regard not the Commands of God. But we say as the Apostles did, 'Tis better to obey God than Man. Some will say, *It gives Offence*: so did the Preaching of the Cross to Jew and Gentile. Not to offend God is no Offence given to Man, but taken by Man. To have a Conscience void of Offence towards God and Man was *Paul's* Exercise, and so 'tis ours; yet he did not forbear to obey God, nor did the other Apostles; because Men took Offence at it, and thought they did God Service in Killing them: & the *Jews* were mad against *Paul* for teaching the *Gentiles* not to observe their Law, though it was commanded

by God, as the Temple was, as these Traditions never were, but by the Pope, *their Lord God*, as the *Canonists* call him, which makes them so mad against us, as threatening to *burn us*. Never did *Protestants* use to threaten, to *burn Papists*, for not keeping the Pope's holy dayes. Never were *Sheep* known to *corry Wolves*, who are distinguished by their bloody Chaps, as *Chryostom* notes, though they may get on *Sheeps Clothing*: *Christ* gives a plainly discerning difference, *By their Fruits ye shall know them*, whether they be *Thorns* and *Thistles*, for they bear *Prickles*. *Christ* notes his *Sheep* by *bearing his Voice*: others hear only *mens voices*. And he says, *They are a Little Flock*: but the *Nations* and *National Worshipers* are *Multitudes*. *All the World* wonders after the *Beast*, and say, *Who is able to contend with him, to disobey him, or say, What dost thou?* the spirit that rules in the *Children of Disobedience*. But why may not we in this, as well as several famous learned of later times, who not only with the ancientest questioned it, but shewed their *Opinions* against it. *Wolphius* says, *The Taxing was not likely to be in Winter, but Autumn*, Dan. 9. *In the midle of the Week he made the Sacrifice to cease*, which ends in the moneth *Nisan*, the first moneth when he suffered: *Wolphius* proves the same by two Reasons, *He ended the Shadows at the time they began, namely, the Pasch, Pentecost, and that in the seventh moneth*. 2dly, *The Jews*, says he, *reckon he was born in such a year, and in the beginning of it to be thirty years old at his Baptism*. *Middleburgensis* says, *The World was created in the Spring Equinox, therefore it was meet the Restauration to be at that time resumed*. But, saith *Hospinian*, if those men that were near that Age knew it not, why should we believe *Middleburgensis*, *Epiphanius*, or those that strive for *December 25*? And why should we this Author? I have heard of some of late that have written of the *Holiness of Places* also (but I have not seen any) and that an eminent Man in the Church shew'd signs of *Reverence* to a Place where a *Consecrated Fabrick* had anciently stood: As I remember I have read that *Pauls in London* was the Temple of *Diana*, and *Peters in Westminster* of *Apollo*, and so of several other Places. And the Author of the *History of the Church of Great Britain*, G. G. writes, *That King Lucius here turned the Places of Arch Flamins of Heathenish Institution into so many Arch-Bishopricks*, (as *Pantheon* at *Rome* into *All-Saints Church*) and the Places of *Twenty Eight Flamins*, or *Jupiter's Priests*, into so

so many Bishopricks; and turned the Temples builded for the worship of Pagan Gods, into Churches, for the Service of Jesus Christ; and that all the Possessions of the Heathen Flamins at Winchester, were conferred on Donatus the Bishop and his Clergy there. And as I remember, Pope Gregory advised Austin to do the like among the Saxons. So here is a very ancient Tradition for their Holy Places. Seeing then they have made men tracle to be their Drudges, Lackyes and Executioners for them and their Informers for their sacred Revenue (as *J. Selden* calls *Tythes*, in his History of them, yet there blaming them that made the divine right of them their Plea) to their Will-Worships (of whose Original much might be spoke too large for a Letter) and to their holy dayes and holy places, as hath been here said. What remains, but that they proceed to their holy Garments (as Cardinal *Woolsey* made the English Nobility bow to his Red Hat, so they) to their White Surplice, the Ornament, as *Dr. Knewstubbs* said, of the Priests of *Isis*, the ancient Egyptian Goddess, ancienter than the Children of *Israel* being in *Egypt*, as some say, a very ancient Tradition, and as old as that of their holy day; unless by *Saturn* be understood *Molech* or *Bel*, the Son of *Nimrod*, the Nephew of *Cham*: an ancient Pedegree indeed of that Tradition; and as ancient as any we read of, unless that *Cain's* Offering, as some are of opinion, were *Tythes* or *First Fruits*, as *J. Selden* writes in the beginning of his History of them; and shews, that some have gone about to prove it from the Art *Cabalistical* in the like number of the Letters of *First Fruits* and *Tythes*: & that is the highest we can go, or rather the lowest in ferriting them in the Burrows & Intrigues & Labyrinths of their dark Traditions: and there we leave them, lest we lose ourselves. What must they do that know nothing of History, save the Scripture. (and scarce them) the good Protestant Plea? Must they by an implicit Faith believe as the Church believes, which they believe not to be the Church of God, nor keeping the Commands of God written in the heart, to love God with all the heart, and their Neighbour as themselves; to do as they would be done to, &c. They that know nothing of History may justly suspect, who was the Instituter of this Feast, by observing who are the most zealous for it, and whose service is done in it, Christ's or Antichrist's. The Interest bespeaks the

Author. So that some, I remember, have written of it, *That more solemn Service hath been done to Satan in the twelve days, than in the whole year besides.* If the Kingdom of God consist in Meat or Drink, or in respect of a Holy Day, and mens Christianity must be judged by that, we have *Christians* by the Belly: And Bell must be a God, for being a *Belly-God*. But the Apostle's Admonition to the true *Christian-Romans* was, *Not in Gluttony and Drunkenness, not in Chambering and Wantonness, not in Strife and Envy; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts of it: And whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, let all be done to the Praise and Glory of God.*

I am th, Friend, and all mens in the Truth,

Richard Richardson.

A few more Quotations for Confirmation of the fore-going.

Laertius in vita Plat. Plato's Birth-day the same with *Apollo's*, as this Author saith, was kept lately in *Florence* by the *Medices*.

Calend. vet. Rom a G. Hewart. Certain days for the Births of *Mars, Apollo, Diana, Minerva, the Muses, Hercules,* and other Gods observed.

T. Langley's Abridgment of Polyd. Virgil, l. 6. c. 5. The manner of keeping holy Birth-dayes, much used in *Rome*, though in *Persia* first.

Ignatius 2 Epist. ad Magn. mentions only the Commemoration of the Lord's Day, forbids to sabbatize *Jewishly* but spiritually. He was the Disciple of *John*. If that was not his, 'twas later.

Augustine ad Januar. The Mercy of God would have the Church free. He lamented that in his time the Conditions of the *Jews* seemed more tolerable, subjected only to Legal Burdens, not Human Traditions.

Lib. Concord. cap. 14. At an Assembly of the Nobility and Clergy of the *Protestants*, where three *Electors* were present, agreed, *That all Ceremonies were left free.* And denyed all that thought them either to be imposed, or submitted to, when imposed, in condescension to Persecutors.

THE END.

